

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Beauty is inextricably linked to fashion, make up, and hairstyle which refers to appearance. Nowadays, the majority of people view others based on their appearance and then they can make judgments about them. Women are still judged by their physical appearance. They must be pretty, slim, and well-dressed to be desirable and noticeable (Wood, 1994). They are depicted as perfect from head to toe based on the beauty standard of every women from around the world. Beauty standard is about how women look and determine their physical as beautiful and attractive which is based on what was agreed by the society (Frederick et al., 2015). Every culture had a unique standard of their attractiveness derived from traditional views about beauty as well as the physical looks of the people. However, after globalization begins rapidly increase, beauty standard is gaining predominance from western societies because western media content has influenced societies and cultures around the world (Yan & Bissell, 2014).

Media industries also overemphasized beauty standards and attractiveness of western beauty ideals, which can also be a problem or issue that is more global. There are different aspects of appearance that the media can convey about beauty ideals, including hair, facial features, and skin tones (Mills et al., 2017). For instance, a woman may have believed that the cosmetic in the advertisement that she saw on the magazine can make the model in the advertisement beautiful.

Consequently, the woman believed the model in the advertisement was the ideal look that she would want to achieve by using this product (Jones, 2008).

Women believe the beauty standard in western countries, such as in America and Europe, are more attractive than non-western or other countries. This activity categorizes as cultural assimilation, which has been found in every local culture that is being integrated into a universal standard of beauty dominated by western beauty standards (Kim, 2010). Western beauty standards are based on idealized depictions of white women's physical look such as fair skin, long straight hair, thin lips, small and pointed nose, and skinny and tall body (Mascaro, 2018). The majority of women portrayed as beautiful in western societies fit the look of being a thin Caucasian with blonde hair and blue or green eyes, so this may be how this look became beauty standard (Maslow, 2015). Those type of beauty standards have been marginalized to women in all countries and reflect the mainstream culture's obsession of women appearance with thinness and whiteness of their body to show their beauty (Chung & Bissell, 2009).

The dominance of western beauty standard negatively affects women in non-western countries and it is leading to poor self-perception (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019). Besides women in non-western countries, the dominance of western beauty standard also affects women in western countries who do not have a physical appearance like others because they have partial ancestry from black racial groups of Africa. They are African-American women who majority have dark skin color and black curly hair (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011). These women are trying to make their appearance to be as similar as the beauty

ideals but their physical appearances are almost entirely different. Therefore, it can be difficult for them to attain beauty standard.

Western beauty standard have been exposed to African American women or black women through media since long time ago and it had made the information very available to them (Wallace, 1979 as cited in Patton, 2006). They have been dealing with the constant pressure of beauty standard that is inauthentic and unattainable. It creates the desire to change their physical appearance in order to achieve western beauty standard because they believe that black is not beautiful (Patton, 2006). Some scholars also have examined the role of physical attractiveness in personal perception to attract others are assessed more favorably, desirably, and more successful in social interactions (Yan & Bissell, 2014).

Skin color, hair, and facial features appear to greatly affect how black women perceive themselves and others. Women who were the most satisfied with their skin color has a more positive perception of their overall physical appearance than those who were less satisfied with their skin color (Falconer & Neville, 2000 as cited in Swain, 2012). It is found that African-American women distinguished between “good” hair and “bad” hair based on the texture, length, curl pattern, and color. Good hair defines as the longer, straighter, and smoother, while “bad” hair defines as short, curly, and woolly hair (Rosado, 2004 as cited in Swain 2012).

However, in this present time, there have been many black women try to build their self-confidence and perception of beauty. Along with the rise of mass media, a new generation of pro-Black proponents are embracing their authentic

beauty of being black and try to against the dominance of western beauty standard (Lue, 2019). For instance, black women hold the 2019 crowns of beauty pageants: Kaliegh Garris (Miss Teen USA), Nia Franklin (Miss America), Cheslie Kryst, (Miss USA), Zozibini Tunzi (Miss Universe), and Toni-Ann Singh (Miss World). It showed that the beauty pageants have evolved from typically only validating beauty standard that associated with white women, like lighter skin and straight hair (Zaverri, 2019). Furthermore, in entrepreneurship, black women also have launched some of the best beauty products on the market, for instance *Fenty Beauty* by Rihanna, *TPH* by Taraji, and *Pattern Beauty* by Tracee Ellis Ross, that concern with the authentic physical appearance of black women (Harvin et al., 2020).

Black women actresses, models, singers, and activists always used their ability and voices on mass media to speak up about black women equality, especially on beauty standard. Magazine becomes one of mass media platforms that is used by them to spread and gain information from various sources. It still plays a critical role in people's perception about what people consider to be beautiful or attractive (Mills et al., 2017). In this modern era, there are two kinds of magazine that are still being used as the publication, it is printed magazine and electronic magazine (*e-magazine*). Magazine also has an important role in influencing public opinion through the information they distribute and interpret from the variety of issues occur in society (Lorimer & Scannell, 1994). There are many categories of magazine, including fashion magazine, health magazine, lifestyle magazine, women and men magazine, and more.

There are many products of magazine appear to spread variety of issues that is related to women. The cover page becomes the most important part of magazine that is used as the identity of the magazine and to attract women to see what's inside the magazine. As the face of magazine, the cover model presented on the cover page are usually reveal the women beauty or the ideal representative of women at that time (Hadd & Rudd, 2014). It can create meaning through the pictorial of the actual life events, place, thing, people, or illustrations to reflect the major stories or features in every edition with some elements such as symbols, signs, cover lines, and colors (Abuya & Akinkulore, 2013). It is important to discover the messages or the meanings that are being presented on the cover magazines, because the elements displayed on the cover can influence the consumer's decision to purchase and read the magazine. From the cover page, the readers also can see a signpost to suggest what they can expect in the content of the magazine (Malkin et al., 1999).

Even though many mass media have been portraying women beauty standard which is mostly based on the whiteness beauty or white people, there are also several mass media which use their publication to focus on black people's issue. One of those media is Essence magazine. Essence magazine is categorized as lifestyle magazine which focus on African-American, especially women from all ages, cultures and shapes. This magazine features all aspects that women need such as fashion, beauty, lifestyle, relationships, entertainment and etc. Their publication is normally one issue per month or one issue for two months (Essence, 2021).

Essence is a friendly magazine not only for African-American but also for black women from around the world because the magazine really support the life

of black people. Essence is trying to help them to motivate and encourage their passion and their lives to live equally, brave, strong without any limitation. The content of this magazine is full of black people models, celebrities, and figures, so the reader will not have to worry or feel insecure when they see the models appear on the magazine (Newsstand, 2021). Different from other western magazines, Essence magazine has their own criteria about the models appear in the magazine, especially on the cover page.

Essence magazine has shown its difference perspective about beauty standard, especially for black women. If other magazines mostly focus on white women as the cover models of the magazine, meanwhile Essence magazine only focus on black women. Essence magazine creates the layouts from a uniquely African-American perspective, without regard to white standards of beauty. On the cover page, it chooses some models who had strongly African features by displaying the whole range of black beauty. The outfits that the models wore are also affordable as well as attractive for black women (Pederson, 1998). Essence magazine never exposed white women on their magazine, neither in contents nor covers. They give black women a media to explore their beauty freely without any interference from white beauty standard.

Several studies have analyzed how magazine gives implicit meaning through its covers. The existence of magazine as the part of mass media is still needed to deliver the informations that people need such as values, norms, health, fashion and so forth. A study entitled *The Representation of Women in Vogue Magazines of 1970 and of 2017: A Social Semiotic and ideological Perspective*



*Study* by Naima & Nesrine (2017) is investigated the representation of women in two selected American Magazines: Vogue Magazine 1970 and Vogue Magazine 2017. They used Social Semiotic Approach by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) to analyze the visual images and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's framework in Dialectic of Enlightenment named 'the Culture Industry' (2002) to explores how women are represented culturally. The researchers found from selected images by both visual and cultural analysis that women are represented differently in the selected magazines. Vogue Magazine 1970 shows women as independent and hard-working people. Meanwhile, Vogue Magazine 2017 portrays women in more modern ways with a photoshopped on their face or body and highly eroticized poses. From this finding, it concluded that women in Vogue Magazines are being associated in 'Culture Industry' throughout years.

The other study by Widayanti (2016) entitled *A Case Study of Multimodal Analysis: The Representation of a Female Model in the 'Insight' Rubric of Male Magazine 147th Edition* used Social Semiotics by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) Wilfred (1962) meaning of colors, and Barnard (2007) theory of fashion and physical appearance for visual data and Halliday (1994) transitivity for the verbal data. This study is analyzed the visual and verbal representations of a female model in the 'insight' rubric of *Male Magazine* 147th edition. The data of this study is from *Male Magazine* 147th edition. The researcher found that in visual analysis, the female model is represented as a physically and spiritually beautiful woman because of the signification of colors, fashions, and physical appearances. While, through the verbal analysis, the female model is represented as a hardworking,

popular, and curious woman who tends to use her feelings in life. She is portrayed to hold her power over the men. It can relate to Indonesian women nowadays that try to hold their powers over the men.

Another study entitled *All a Black Woman Needs is Great Sex and a Sexy Body: Themes in True Love Magazine Cover Lines* by Madlela, Khulekani (2019) used social constructivism and Stuart Hall's representation theories on the 12 front covers of South African *True Love* magazine published between June 2015 and May 2016 to examine themes of black femininity presented on the cover lines of True Love Magazine. Furthermore, the researcher also applied Galician's myths, a combination of social semiotic analysis and qualitative content analysis of 83 cover lines published in the 12 issues. The result showed the cover lines reflect and construct individual personal identity as well as collective black feminine identities and social-cultural context also played big roles in influencing the media to portray their identity. The researcher argued the magazine is like other media, in which mainly feature black women as glamorous sex objects, present unrealistic portrayals, and expectations of sex and romantic love. Body and Sexual Objectification of black women in *True Love* Magazine may result in racial and gender role stereotyping in society believing that black women are seductive and frivolous sex objects that they can treat them without respect (Lavine, Sweeney, and Wagner 1999:1050).

A study conducted by Latvėnaitė (2020) entitled *Visual Analysis of GQ Magazine Covers: intersections between gender, race, and sexuality* also argued that *GQ* magazine employs the same representational patterns acknowledged in



culture and the magazine's market or audience. The research used a mixed-method approach of combining the quantitative content analysis and qualitative social semiotics, and the inter-categorical methodological approach to intersectionality. This research seeks to investigate cover issues published from 1984 to 2017 in total, there are 136 *GQ* magazine issues, by employing random sampling technique. The researcher found that the same representational patterns in culture and the magazine's target audience manifest in the women sexual objectification, racial exclusion, and emphasis on white heterosexual maleness. In addition, the intersectional analysis also revealed that women of color and sexual minorities are in the least favorable position regarding representational patterns on *GQ* magazine.

Women in magazine have been analyzed by many researchers but none of them examined the beauty of black women in *Essence Magazine*. All those previous studies have similarities and differences with this study. This study uses *Essence Magazine* covers as the corpus meanwhile, the previous are using *Vogue*, *Male Magazine*, *True Love*, and *GQ Magazine* to see the women representation in the magazine. Differ from those previous related studies, this study focuses on black women beauty in *Essence* magazine covers. Thus, the writer tries to reveal the gap inside those previous studies which related to magazine covers with new perspective about black women beauty.

Nevertheless, in this study the writer will analyze seven issues of *Essence Magazine* Covers by using Social Semiotics by Kress and Van Leeuwen based on the three metafunctions that consist of representational, interpersonal and compositional metafunctions for visual text (images) and Systemic Functional

Linguistics by Halliday for verbal text (cover lines) to reveal how *Essence* magazine portrays beauty of black women through the covers. Descriptive analytical method and text-based qualitative research design were used to analyse the visual and verbal text. Therefore, the result in this study will broaden the reader's knowledge and understanding about the beauty of black women.

### **1.2 Research Question**

How do *Essence* magazine covers portray black women beauty?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to reveal the portrayal of black women beauty by *Essence* magazine through its covers.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on seven issues of *Essence* magazine covers published from 2018 to 2020. The covers are chosen based on the issue that this study wants to analyze which focus on black women beauty and how they were represented by *Essence* magazine. On the cover page of those seven issues, it captured how black women as the models show their beauty through the images and cover lines that are

also related to the topic on each issue. The issues raised from 2018 to 2020 are dominated by the power of black women beauty.

### **1.5 Significances of the Study**

This study is expected to broaden the reader's knowledge and understanding on the beauty of black women, specifically in women magazine covers. The findings of this study is also expected to be useful as sources for future studies that focus on black women beauty.

